

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A method for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the method comprising:

1
a. obtaining for each of the parties in the first class and storing in a first digital storage medium responses from at least one of the party and a party co-evaluator to a first set of forced choice questions designed to permit analysis of the responses in terms of a first plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another so as to reveal underlying party preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b. obtaining for each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in a second digital storage medium responses from at least one of the counterparty and a counterparty co-evaluator to a second set of forced choice questions designed to permit analysis of the responses in terms of a second plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another and complementary to said first plurality of attributes so as to reveal underlying counterparty preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

c. deriving, in a first computer process, from the responses to the first set of questions for each such party, a first preference profile for each such party through conjoint analysis of the responses;

d. deriving, in a second computer process, from the responses to the second set of questions for each such counterparty, a second preference profile for each such counterparty through conjoint analysis of the responses;

e. for each party, analyzing, in a third computer process, the preference profile of such party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a first list of counterparties for which the preferences of the party closely match the preferences of the counterparty and the preferences of the counterparty closely match the preferences of the party and communicating the first list to such party.

Claim 2 (previously presented): A method according to claim 1, further comprising;

for each counterparty, analyzing, in a fourth computer process, the preference profile of such counterparty in relation to the preference profiles of the parties to derive a second list of parties for which the preferences of the party closely match the preferences of the counterparty and the preferences of the counterparty closely match the preferences of the party and communicating the second list to such counterparty.

Claim 3 (previously presented): A method according to claim 1, wherein the first list is ranked according to the closeness of fit.

Claim 4 (previously presented): A method according to claim 2, wherein the second list is ranked according to the closeness of fit.

Claim 5 (previously presented): A method according to claim 1, wherein obtaining responses from each of the parties is accomplished using communication over a communication network.

Claim 6 (previously presented): A method according to claim 1, wherein obtaining responses from each of the counterparties is accomplished using communication over a communication network.

Claim 7 (original): A method according to claim 5, wherein obtaining responses from each of the parties includes making a first set of web pages available to each of the parties, via a server, the first set of such pages providing the first set of questions and permitting entry by such party of responses thereto.

Claim 8 (original): A method according to claim 6, wherein obtaining responses from each of the counterparties includes making a second set of web pages available to each of the counterparties, via a server, the second set of such pages providing the second set of questions and permitting entry by such counterparty of responses thereto.

Claim 9 (original): A method according to claim 1, wherein a substantial number of the first set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the party places on the level of the attribute.

Claim 10 (original): A method according to claim 9, wherein a second substantial number of the second set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a second series of attributes that complements the first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the counterparty places on the level of the attribute.

Claim 11 (original): A method according to claim 10, wherein the process of analyzing the preference profile of the party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties is performed using a measure of distance between a set of

utility values created with respect to the first series of attributes and a set of utility values created for the second series of attributes.

Claim 12 (original): A method according to claim 9, wherein each of the first set of questions requires the party to rank each of a non-null set of items from among a plurality of possible ranks.

Claim 13 (original): A method according to claim 12, wherein each of the second set of questions requires the counterparty to rank each of a non-null set of items from among a plurality of possible ranks.

Claim 14 (original): A method according to claim 9, wherein the substantial number of the first set of questions elicits revelation of the utility values without asking for the values explicitly.

Claim 15 (original): A method according to claim 10, wherein the second substantial number of the second set of questions elicits revelation of the utility values without asking for the values explicitly.

Claim 16 (original): A method according to claim 1, wherein the preference profile of each party associates, with each level of each of a first series of attributes, a utility value to indicate the value which the party places on the level of the attribute.

Claim 17 (previously presented): A method according to claim 16, wherein the preference profile of each counterparty associates, with each level of each of a second series of attributes that complements the first series of attributes, a utility value to indicate the value which the counterparty places on each level of the attribute.

Claim 18 (canceled).

Claim 19 (previously presented): A method according to claim 1, wherein each party co-evaluator is one of: (i) an associate of the party, (ii) a member of a group to which the party belongs, wherein the group is relevant to such context, (iii) a parent or guardian of the party, (iv) an advisor to the party, (iv) a relative of the party, and (v) a friend of the party.

Claim 20 (previously presented): A method according to claim 1, wherein each counterparty co-evaluator is one of: (i) an associate of the counterparty, (ii) a member of a group to which the counterparty belongs, wherein the group is relevant to such context, (iii) a parent or guardian of the counterparty, (iv) an advisor to the counterparty, (iv) a relative of the counterparty, and (v) a friend of the counterparty.

Claim 21 (canceled).

Claim 22 (currently amended): An apparatus for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

a. a first computer process, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining for each of the parties in the first class and storing in the first digital storage medium responses from at least one of the party and a party co-evaluator to a first set of forced choice questions designed to permit analysis of the responses in terms of a first plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another so as to reveal underlying party preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b. a second computer process, in communication with a second digital storage medium, for obtaining for each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in the second digital storage medium responses from at least one of the counterparty and a counterparty co-evaluator to a second set of forced choice questions designed to permit analysis of the responses in terms of a second plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another and complementary to said first plurality of attributes so as to reveal underlying counterparty preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party such context;

c. a third computer process for deriving from the responses to the first set of questions for each such party a first preference profile for each such party through conjoint analysis of the responses;

d. a fourth computer process for deriving from the responses to the second set of questions for each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty through conjoint analysis of the responses; and

e. a fifth computer process for analyzing the preference profile of each party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a list of counterparties for which the preferences of the party closely match the preferences of the counterparty and the preferences of the counterparty closely match the preferences of the party, and communicating the list to such party.

Claim 23 (currently amended): An apparatus for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

a. a first question and response module, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining for each of the parties in the first class and storing in the first digital storage medium responses from at least one of the party and a party co-evaluator to a first set of forced choice questions designed to

permit analysis of the responses in terms of a first plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another so as to reveal underlying party preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b. a second question and response module, in communication with a second digital storage medium, for obtaining for each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in the second digital storage medium responses from at least one of the counterparty and a counterparty co-evaluator to a second set of forced choice questions designed to permit analysis of the responses in terms of a second plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another and complementary to said first plurality of attributes so as to reveal underlying counterparty preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

c. a first profile processor for deriving from the responses to the first set of questions for each such party a first preference profile for each such party through conjoint analysis of the responses;

d. a second profile processor for deriving from the responses to the second set of questions for each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty through conjoint analysis of the responses; and

e. a closeness-of-fit analyzer for analyzing the preference profile of each party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a list of counterparties for which the preferences of the party closely match the preferences of the counterparty and the preferences of the counterparty closely match the preferences of the party, and communicating the list to such party.

Claim 24 (canceled).

Claim 25. (currently amended): A method of structuring a database to facilitate evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of

an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the method comprising:

a. obtaining for each of the parties in the first class and storing in a first data record in a first digital storage medium responses from at least one of the party and a party co-evaluator to a first set of forced choice questions designed to permit analysis of the responses in terms of a first plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another so as to reveal underlying party preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b. obtaining for each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in a second data record in a second digital storage medium responses from at least one of the counterparty and a counterparty co-evaluator to a second set of forced choice questions designed to permit analysis of the responses in terms of a second plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another and complementary to said first plurality of attributes so as to reveal underlying counterparty preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

c. deriving, in a first computer process, from the responses to the first set of questions for each such party a first preference profile for each such party through conjoint analysis of the responses, and storing the first preference profile in a third data record in a third digital storage medium;

d. deriving, in a second computer process, from the responses to the second set of questions for each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty through conjoint analysis of the responses, and storing the second preference profile in a fourth data record in a fourth digital storage medium;

e. for each party, analyzing, in a third computer process, the preference profile of such party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a first list of counterparties for which the preferences of

the party closely match the preferences of the counterparty and the preferences of the counterparty closely match the preferences of the party and storing the first list in a fifth data record in a fifth digital storage medium.

Claim 26 (original): A method according to claim 25, wherein a substantial number of the first set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the party places on the level of the attribute, and wherein a set of utility values so created is stored in the third data record.

Claim 27 (original): A method according to claim 26, wherein a second substantial number of the second set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a second series of attributes that complements the first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the counterparty places on the level of the attribute, and wherein a set of utility values so created is stored in the fourth data record.

Claim 28 (original): A method according to claim 27, wherein the process of analyzing the preference profile of the party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties is performed using a measure of distance between the set of utility values stored in the third data record and the set of utility values stored in the fourth data record.

Claim 29 (currently amended): An apparatus for structuring a database, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

a. a first question and response module, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining for each of the parties in the first class and

storing in a first data record in the first digital storage medium responses from at least one of the party and a party co-evaluator to a first set of forced choice questions designed to permit analysis of the responses in terms of a first plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another so as to reveal underlying party preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b. a second question and response module, in communication with a second digital storage medium, for obtaining for each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in a second data record in the second digital storage medium responses from at least one of the counterparty and a counterparty co-evaluator to a second set of forced choice questions designed to permit analysis of the responses in terms of a second plurality of attributes that are essentially orthogonal to one another and complementary to said first plurality of attributes so as to reveal underlying counterparty preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

c. a first profile processor for deriving from the responses to the first set of questions for each such party a first preference profile for each such party through conjoint analysis of the responses, and storing the first preference profile in a third data record in a third digital storage medium;

d. a second profile processor for deriving from the responses to the second set of questions for each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty through conjoint analysis of the responses, and storing the second preference profile in a fourth data record in a fourth digital storage medium; and

e. a closeness-of-fit analyzer for analyzing the preference profile of each party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a list of counterparties for which the preferences of the party closely match the preferences of the counterparty and the preferences of the counterparty closely match the preferences of the party, and storing the list in a fifth data record in a fifth digital storage medium.